

Hurricanes: What You Need to Know

Stay Safe Before, During and After a Hurricane or Tropical Storm

Hurricanes can be dangerous and deadly.

A hurricane is a type of tropical cyclone or severe tropical storm that can be life threatening and cause serious hazards such as flooding, storm surge, high winds and tornadoes. Having a plan and being prepared will provide you with the best protection from the dangerous conditions caused by a hurricane.



Know the Terms

Familiarize yourself with these terms to help identify a hurricane hazard:

Tropical Storm: An organized system of strong thunderstorms with a defined surface circulation and maximum sustained winds of 39–73 mph.

Hurricane: An intense tropical weather system of strong thunderstorms with a well-defined surface circulation and maximum sustained winds of 74 mph or higher.

Storm Surge: Water that is pushed toward the shore by the force of the winds swirling around the storm. Storm surge can reach heights well over 20 feet and can span hundreds of miles of coastline.

Hurricane Watch: Hurricane conditions are a threat within 48 hours. Review your hurricane plans. Get ready to act if a warning is issued and stay informed.

Hurricane Warning: Hurricane conditions are expected within 36 hours. Complete your storm preparations and leave the area if directed to do so by authorities.

Before a Hurricane

Build an emergency supplies kit and make a family communications plan.

- Your family's emergency supplies kit should include enough food, water and supplies to last each member of your household for at least 72 hours or 3 days.

- Create a communications plan to help each member of your family get in touch with each other if you are not together when the storm comes in.

Know your surroundings.

- Learn the elevation level of your property and whether the land is flood-prone.
- This will help you know how your property will be affected when storm surge or tidal flooding are forecast.
- Identify levees and dams in your area and determine whether they pose a hazard to your property.
- Learn community hurricane evacuation routes and how to find higher ground.
- Determine where you would go and how you would get there if you needed to evacuate.

Make plans to secure your property.

- Cover all of your home's windows.
- Permanent storm shutters offer the best protection. A second option is to board up windows with 5/8" marine plywood, cut to fit and ready to install. Tape does not prevent windows from breaking.
- Install straps or additional clips to securely fasten your roof to the frame structure. This will reduce roof damage.
- Be sure trees and shrubs around your home are well trimmed so they are more wind resistant.

- Clear loose and clogged rain gutters and downspouts.
- Reinforce your garage doors. If wind enters a garage it can cause dangerous and expensive structural damage.
- If you own a boat, know how and where to secure it.
- Install a generator for emergencies.
- If in a high-rise building, be prepared to take shelter on or below the 10th floor.
- Consider building a safe room.

During a Hurricane

If a hurricane is likely in your area, you should:

- Listen to the radio or TV or look on the internet for information.
- Secure your home, close storm shutters and secure outdoor objects or bring them indoors.
- Turn off utilities if instructed to do so.
- Otherwise, turn the refrigerator thermostat to its coldest setting and keep its doors closed.
- Turn off propane tanks.
- Avoid using the phone, except for serious emergencies.
- Ensure a supply of water for sanitary purposes such as cleaning and flushing toilets. Fill the bathtub and other large containers with water.

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You should evacuate under the following conditions:

- If you are directed by local authorities to do so. Be sure to follow their instructions.
- If you live in a mobile home or temporary structure. Such shelters are particularly hazardous during hurricanes no matter how well they are fastened to the ground.
- If you live in a high-rise building.
- Hurricane winds are stronger at higher elevations.
- If you live on the coast, on a floodplain, near a river or on an inland waterway.
- If you feel you are in danger

If you are unable to evacuate, go to your wind-safe room. If you do not have one, follow these guidelines:

- Stay indoors during the hurricane and away from windows and glass doors.
- Close all interior doors. Secure and brace external doors.
- Keep curtains and blinds closed. Do not be fooled if there is a lull; it could be the eye of the storm and winds will pick up again. Take refuge in a small interior room, closet or hallway on the lowest level.
- Lie on the floor under a table or another sturdy object.

After a Hurricane

- Continue listening to weather reports from the National Weather Service on the radio or watch the local news for the latest updates.
- Stay alert for extended rain and flooding even after the storm has ended.

- If you have evacuated your home, return only when officials say it is safe.
- Drive only if necessary and avoid flooded roads and washed-out bridges.
- Stay off the streets. If you must go out, watch for fallen objects, downed electrical wires and weakened walls, bridges, roads and sidewalks.
- Keep away from loose or dangling power lines and report them immediately to the power company.
- Walk carefully around the outside of your home and check for loose power lines, gas leaks and structural damage before entering.
- Inspect your home for damage. Take pictures of damage, both of the building and its contents, for insurance purposes.
- If you have any doubts about safety, have your residence inspected by a qualified building inspector or structural engineer before entering.
- Use battery-powered flashlights in the dark. Do not use candles during a power outage due to extreme risk of fire.
- Watch your pets closely and keep them under your direct control.
- Watch out for wild animals, especially snakes after a major storm. Snakes tend to seek shelter around the insides and outside of houses after a hurricane. They may also be found under debris. Use a stick to poke through debris.
- Avoid drinking or preparing food with tap water until you are sure it's not contaminated.

- Check refrigerated food for spoilage. If in doubt, throw it out.
- Wear protective clothing and be cautious when cleaning up to avoid injury.
- Use the phone for emergency calls only.
- NEVER use a generator inside homes, garages, crawlspaces, sheds or similar areas, even when using fans or opening doors and windows for ventilation. Deadly levels of carbon monoxide can quickly build up in these areas and can linger for hours, even after the generator has shut off.

If you become separated from your family:

- Use your family communications plan.
- Contact the American Red Cross at **1-800-RED-CROSS** or visit the American Red Cross Safe and Well site at this URL: **www.safeandwell.org**

If you cannot return home and have immediate housing needs:

- Text **SHELTER + your ZIP code** to 43362 (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelter in your area (example: shelter 12345).

Sources:
www.redcross.org
www.fema.gov

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